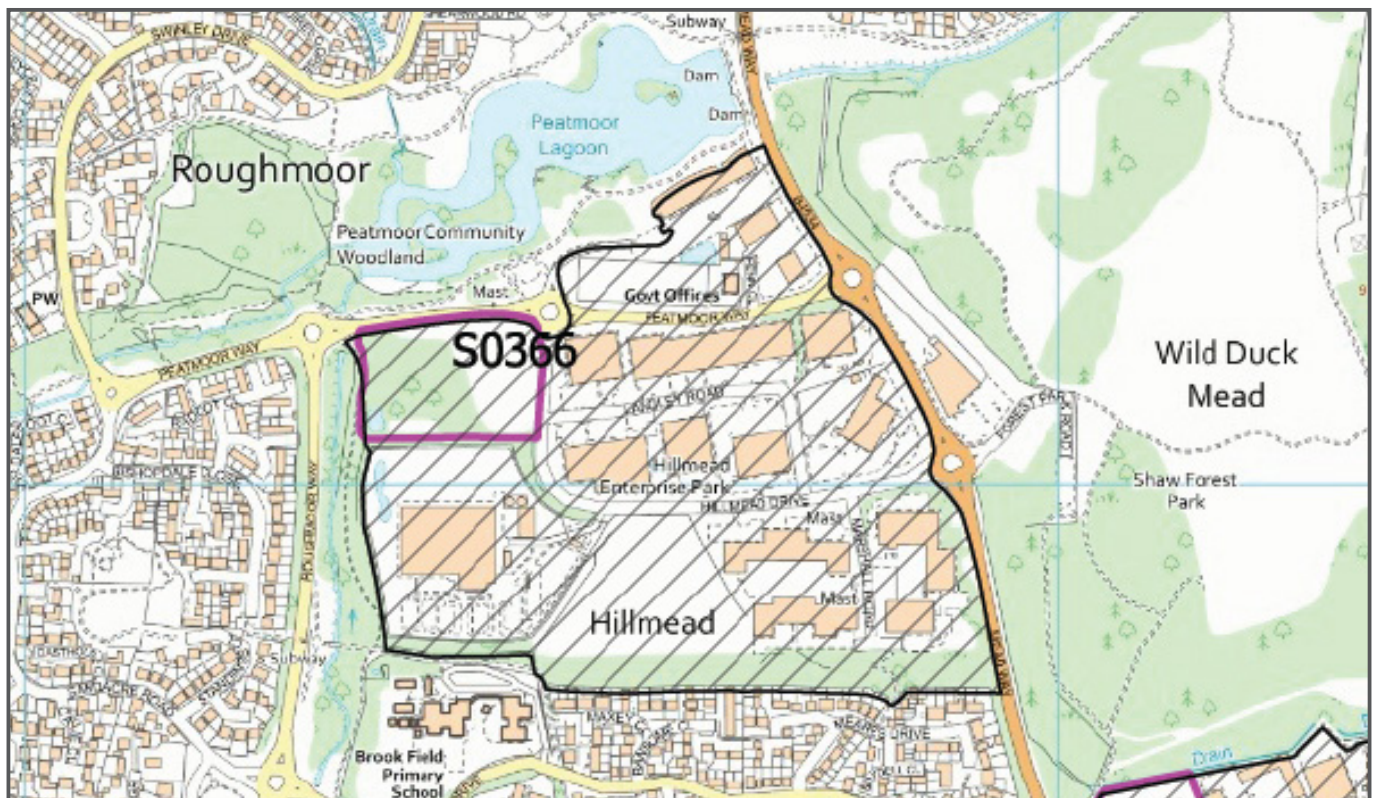




Preserving SO366 at Hillmead Employment Area as part of Swindon's Green Infrastructure

Let it continue to rewild naturally



From: Roger Ogle, Whitefield Crescent, West Swindon

To: Councillor Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Property, Swindon Borough Council

cc: Cllr Tim Swinyard, Chair Planning Committee, Swindon Borough Council
Cllr Mary Martin, Swindon Borough Councillor of Shaw
Cllr Nick Martin, Swindon Borough Councillor of Shaw
West Swindon Parish Council chair Nigel Gibbons, for discussion at the parish council

I'm very concerned about the future use of land at Hillmead shown as SO366 on the current Local Plan review for the Borough of Swindon. I understand the public consultation period has closed, but also the process is an ongoing exercise.

As you may recall I spoke about this site at West Swindon Parish Council Planning & Environment Committee discussion about the Local Plan on 5 September. Whilst the council resolved that environmental concerns be taken into consideration with regard to SO366, I would like the Emerging Strategy for Swindon's Local Plan to pay much closer attention to the ecological value of this site and switch the designation from employment provision to climate change mitigation.

Thamesdown Borough Council acquired the land as part of the expansion to the west of Swindon in the 1970s, designating the area on either side of Hillmead Drive for employment purposes. SO366 was once farm fields adjacent to Lydiard Brook and has not been touched. In the last 40 years the site has become naturally rewilded, half as unmanaged grassland, the other half has become wet woodland of scrub and trees with at least two ponds.

There have been urgent calls from climate change scientists for policy makers and politicians to take action to preserve and protect carbon-trapping ecosystems such as forest, grassland, peatlands and wetlands to enable much larger amounts of carbon dioxide to be absorbed from the atmosphere. Without human intervention SO366 has naturally evolved to become part of the town's green infrastructure network. It should be permitted to remain as an ecologically biodiverse area.

The development of the nearby Trinity Park warehousing and distribution site off Hillmead Drive illustrates an environmental disaster that has taken place over the last 18 months. A large, untouched, grassland was completely stripped to lay a concrete base for a huge steel framed building and massive truck maneuvering area and car park - an impermeable area of 16,400m². The carbon captured in the soil over hundreds of years was released into the atmosphere and, of course, cannot be replaced. The speculative 78,750 sq ft development will only offer a limited number of jobs in relation to its size. It will also increase the number of polluting HGVs travelling to and from the site on already congested roads around West Swindon. There will be no net biodiversity gain to meet the requirements of the National Policy Planning Framework.

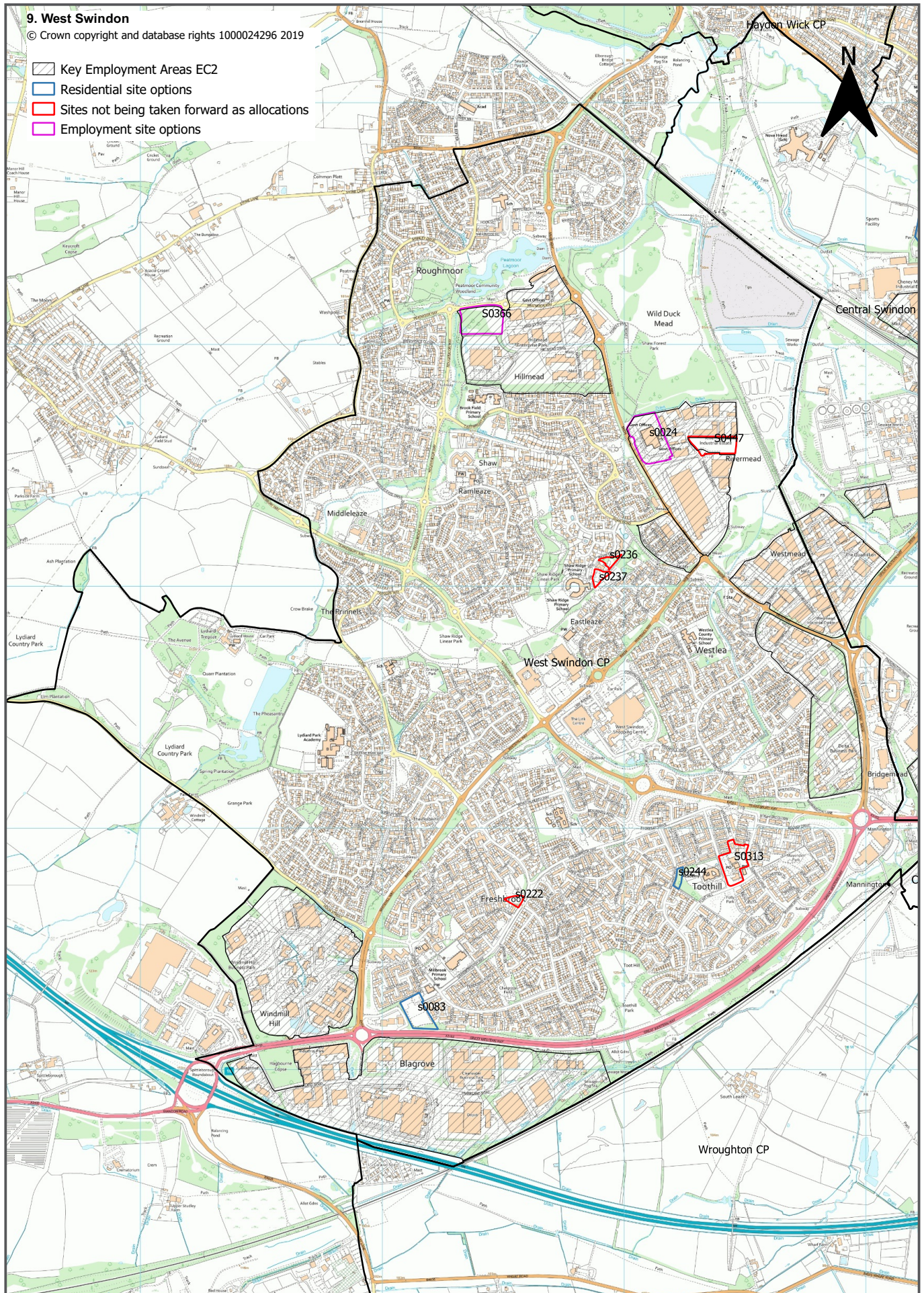
Trees trap high levels of carbon from the atmosphere, they are the lungs of the earth. All political parties have responded positively to the evidence of climate science for more trees to be planted - urgently - to achieve the aim of net carbon zero emission by 2050.

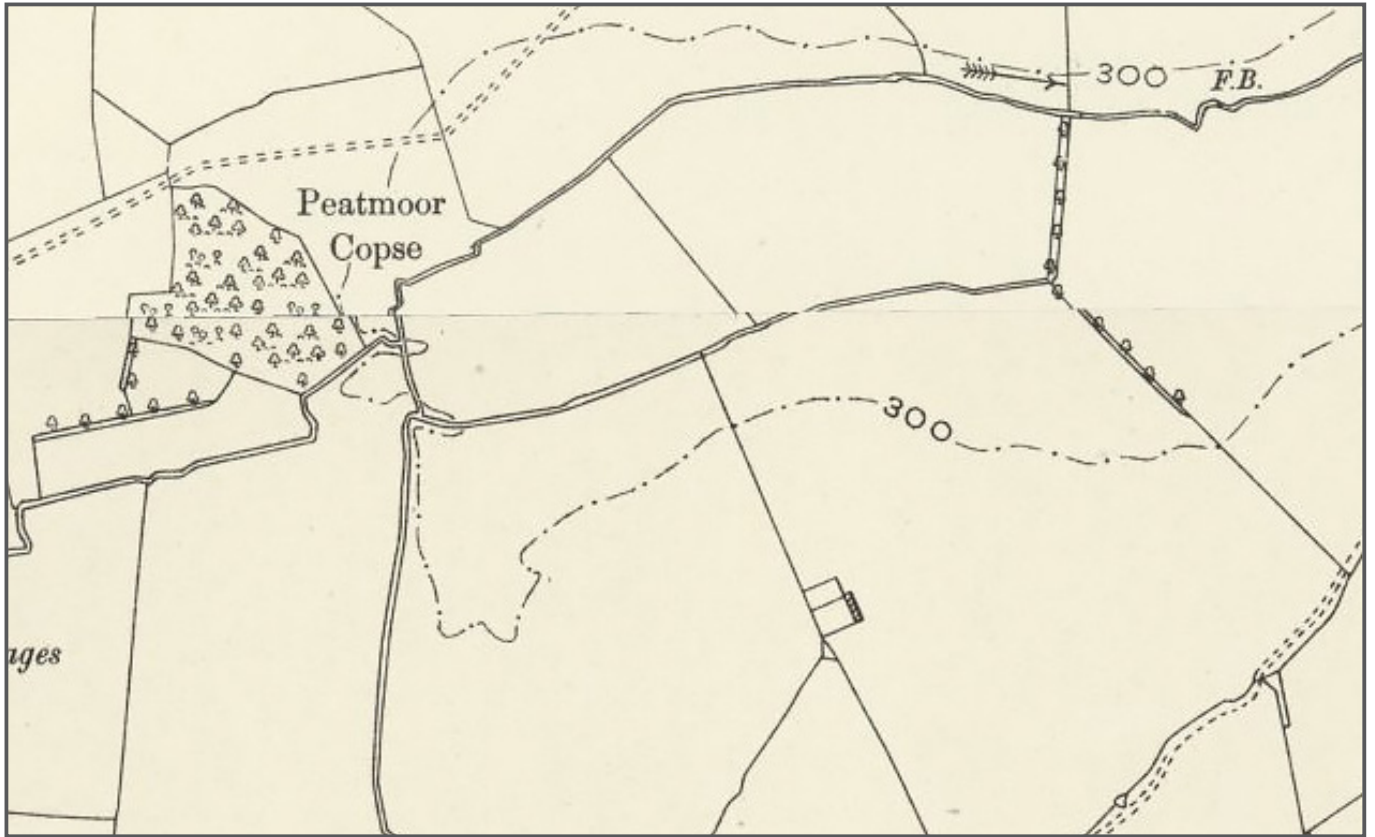
Swindon Borough Council should make SO366 an exemplar of its commitment to the environment by:

1. preserving the rewilded rough woodland area and its ponds and seeking recommendations as to how it should be managed into the future;
3. the grassland area should be planted with different types of native trees to create a new woodland as an immediate investment in carbon capture capacity for the future.

Don't let an important rewilded area be destroyed to comply with a development

SO366 located within the green setting of West Swindon





SO366, from green field on the 1888 OS Map to threatened environmental area.
(Side by side image from the National Library of Scotland <https://maps.nls.uk>)



An undeveloped area beside Hillmead Industrial Estate, West Swindon

Report of a visit on 12 October 2019

The north-west corner of this 'Key Employment Area' is marked as a 'sites not being taken forward as allocations', S0366 in the Swindon Borough Local Plan.

The western three-fifths is woodland consisting of dense scrub mainly of willow, but also with blackthorn and ash. There are open, damp glades. Some of these may be flooded in winter and are dominated by sedges with water's edge plants (Gypsy-wort, Purple Loosestrife and Water Mint) on drier parts.

The remaining two-fifths is rough grassland dominated by False Oat-grass with abundant Creeping Thistle, Great Willowherb and patches of Nettle and Bramble. There is also occasional Purple Loosestrife, Hairy Sedge, Meadowsweet, Amphibious Bistort and a small patch of Water Chickweed, all typical of damp meadows. A variety of less competitive herbaceous plants is to be found around the edges of the field. A few Ash and Oak saplings have established themselves and there is a single large White Willow growing beside several smaller Crack Willows.

The grassland is dominated by a small selection of species, but with an annual cut in late summer/early autumn, other plants already present could spread and develop, producing a more diverse mixture of species. If left, it will gradually turn into scrub and ultimately into woodland.

Wetland plants provide interest in the woodland area. These grow where the canopy is thin or absent and will probably be lost as the canopy closes. Maintaining or increasing the glades would favour the survival of these plants.

A spreadsheet of plant records is provided. It is probable that some species were missed as this was a late survey.

Richard Aisbitt, October 2109
Recorder with the Wiltshire Botanical Society

Grassland survey, Hillmead, Swindon, 12/10/2019 by Richard Aisbitt				
Taxon	Vernacular	GridRef	Quantity	Comment
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow Parsley	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False Oat-Grass	SU114861	Abundant (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	Mugwort	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Calystegia sepium</i>	Hedge Bindweed	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Carex hirta</i>	Hairy Sedge	SU114861	Occasional (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Common Knapweed	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Creeping Thistle	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	Smooth Hawk's-beard	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	Tufted Hair-grass	SU114861	Occasional (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Dipsacus fullonum</i>	Wild Tassel	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>	Great Willowherb	SU114861	Frequent (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Epilobium obscurum</i>	Short-fruited Willowherb	SU114861	Occasional (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	Spindle	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, suckering
<i>Euphorbia peplis</i>	Petty Spurge	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	Meadowsweet	SU114861	Occasional (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, saplings
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Cleavers	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood Avens	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>	Ground-ivy	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Helminthotheca echioides</i>	Bristly Ox-tongue	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	Perforate St John's-wort	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Juncus inflexus</i>	Hard Rush	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Lactuca serriola</i>	Prickly Lettuce	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Laminum album</i>	White Dead-nettle	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Lapsana communis</i>	Nipplewort	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	Meadow Vetchling	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Linaria vulgaris</i>	Common Toadflax	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	Purple-loosestrife	SU114861	Occasional (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Myosoton aquaticum</i>	Water Chickweed	SU11498609	Locally Frequent	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Persicaria amphibia</i>	Amphibious Bistort	SU114861	Rare (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort Plantain	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Potentilla reptans</i>	White Dead-nettle	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Prunus domestica</i>	Wild Plum	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Pedunculate Oak	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, saplings
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Meadow Buttercup	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Rosa canina</i>	Dog-rose	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edges, sens str.
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	Bramble	SU114861	Locally Dominant	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	Curled Dock	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Rumex sanguineus</i>	Wood Dock	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Salix alba</i>	White Willow	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, large multi-stemmed tree
<i>Salix x fragilis</i>	Hybrid Crack-willow (S. euixina x alba)	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, several medium trees
<i>Senecio crucifolius</i>	Hoary Ragwort	SU114861	Occasional (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	Common Ragwort	SU114861	Rare (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Sison amomum</i>	Stone Parsley	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Stellaria media</i>	Common Chickweed	SU114861	Present	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate, edge
<i>Symphytium officinale</i>	Common Comfrey	SU114861	Occasional (DAFOR)	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle	SU114861	Locally Dominant	Undeveloped field, Hillmead industrial estate

Original farmland ponds or naturally occurring water storage areas within SO366



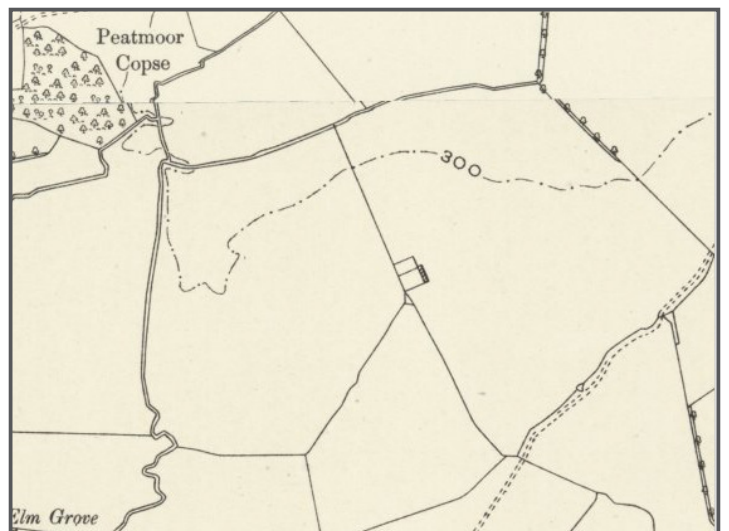


Above, Trinity Park, Hillmead Drive, West Swindon, a digital illustration of the expanse of concrete, now nearing completion

Right, the site already on Google's aerial photographs



Right, greenfields in the past



Magic Map published by the Department for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs includes the wooded part of SO366
in the Natural England Priority Habitat Inventory

<https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap>

Coordinates (411346, 186108) Grid Ref: SU11348610

